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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4146  
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHBPCOM/MEDTRE FAC COMFORT PRIORITY  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL//J2/J3/J5// PRIORITY  
RHBVJPX/COMPHIBRON SIX PRIORITY  
RHBPCOM/USNS COMFORT PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 000501

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CEN KRAAIMOORE  
DEPT FOR DRL MAGGIO  
DEPT FOR INR/IAA EMERSSON  
STATE FOR USOAS  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [OTRA](#) [NU](#)

SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: AMBASSADOR TRIP TO RAAN OVERSHADOWED BY  
INDIGENOUS INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION

REF: A. MANAGUA 415

[1](#)B. MANAGUA 84

[1](#)C. 2008 MANAGUA 1329

[1](#)D. 2008 MANAGUA 1195

Classified By: Ambassador Robert J. Callahan for reasons 1.4 (b & d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On April 21 and 22 Ambassador Callahan traveled for the first time to Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua's North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN). During his two-day trip, he met with opposition, religious and indigenous leaders, held a press conference, and inaugurated a USAID-funded school in Santa Marta to replace one destroyed by hurricane Felix in September 2007. While the visit came shortly after a declaration of independence by the Miskito Council of Elders (see reftel A), the Ambassador made clear our support for Nicaragua's territorial integrity. END SUMMARY

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OPPOSITION LEADERS LEARY ABOUT INDEPENDENCE DECLARATION  
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[1](#)2. (C) During a lunch meeting with RAAN opposition and regional leaders, including former Puerto Cabezas mayoral candidates Osorno "Blas" Coleman, Ambassador Callahan discussed the recent election of the "Wihta Tara" (Miskito for Grand Judge) by the Miskito Council of Elders and his subsequent declaration of independence for the Miskito Coast (see reftel A). Coleman told the Ambassador that while there are many in the Miskito community that support the concept of independence because of decades of broken promises by the successive Nicaraguan national and regional leaders, he thought that the Council of Elders were going about it the wrong way. Instead of unilaterally declaring independence, Coleman said that the Council of Elders needed to consult with other ethnic and indigenous groups in both autonomous regions and hold a referendum. Without strong internal & international support and financial resources, the experiment was likely to fail.

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AMBASSADOR PRESS CONFERENCE & RADIO ADDRESS  
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13. (C) Immediately following the lunch meeting, the Ambassador visited Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU) and held meetings with its Rector and administration, followed afterwards by a press conference also held on the campus. During the press conference, which consisted primarily of local media/radio outlets and a "La Prensa" regional newspaper correspondent, the Ambassador fielded general questions about USG programs in the region. One reporter asked about the USG position on the recent independence declaration by the Wihta Tara, and the Ambassador responded that the US supports the territorial integrity of Nicaragua and that this was an internal matter for the people of Nicaragua to resolve peacefully. At the conclusion of the press conference, the Ambassador gave a 15-minute radio address in Spanish, which was simultaneously translated into Miskito by Javier Williams, former Vice Foreign Minister, at radio station VECA. During this impromptu radio address, the Ambassador emphasized the friendship and cooperation that the USG shares with Nicaraguans in the RAAN, as demonstrated by our 2007 Hurricane Felix relief assistance (see reftel C) and the two-week-long humanitarian visit of the USS Kearsarge in August 2008.

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MEETINGS WITH FSLN LANDGRAB VICTIM & MISKITO SURVIVOR  
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14. (C) Later that day the Ambassador met with James "Jimmy" Webster, a former Nicaraguan professional baseball player from the Atlantic Coast during the 1970's and presidential candidate in 1996. Webster, a Creole-Miskito originally from Bluefields, is the grandson of Samuel Pitts, a famous indigenous leader who raised an army of over 6,000 Miskito Indians to attack Managua in the early 1900's over the illegal incorporation of the Caribbean coast into Nicaragua. Webster was educated in the United States and received his bachelor's degree in forestry. He served as an official in the Ministry of Forestry under a previous administration and was working as a contractor with the Academy of Educational Development (AED) Spiny Lobster Project. In the 1980's, Mr. Webster's cattle ranch in the RAAN was expropriated by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and converted into a military base to fight the Contras. He lost hundreds of heads of cattle, trucks, and his home in the illegal action, but has never received any compensation from the GON. Webster explained that the current independence movement was nothing new and that he was a co-author with former coastal Sandinista leader Ray Hooker of the Law 28 which established the two autonomous regions in 1987.

15. (C) The Ambassador held a dinner meeting with Catholic Church leader Father Rudolfo French. Father French is a Miskito, who at age thirteen was violently removed from his family's traditional village on the Rio Coco by FSLN troops led by Manuel Calderon, the current mayor of Leon (see reftel D). He and his family wandered for weeks through the war-torn area until entering refugee camps outside of Puerto Cabezas. The experience changed him forever -- Father French dedicated the rest of his life to God and currently leads the Catholic Church's missionary efforts in the RAAN.

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USG FULFILLS PROMISES  
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16. (U) In September 2007 Hurricane Felix destroyed hundreds of homes, schools, churches and public buildings in the RAAN (see reftel B and C). One of the main purposes for the Ambassador's trip was to inaugurate a new school, constructed through USAID's Excelencia program in the Miskito community of Santa Marta, which was devastated by Hurricane Felix. When EmbOff visited Santa Marta four months earlier (reftel B), the children were still holding classes in an old barn under USAID tarps. Now they have a brand new school building with modern features, electrical outlets, and reinforced construction to serve as a community shelter in

the event of severe weather. In addition to the new school facilities, USAID through a grant to local NGO FADCANIC supplied the school with new bi-lingual textbooks (Spanish and Miskito) and materials. The inauguration ceremony took place on April 22 and included dignitaries from the Ministry of Education, the Santa Marta community, and Ray Hooker, president of FADCANIC. Martha Downs, the FSLN Vice-Mayor of Puerto Cabezas, also attended the ceremony in the audience, although she had not been invited.

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COMMENT  
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17. (C) The issue of RAAN independence clearly inevitably required prominence in Ambassador meetings with political and religious leaders as well as the press. The "La Prensa" national newspaper carried a story about the Ambassador's visit on April 23, reporting on the school inauguration event in Santa Marta. However, all subsequent reports about the trip (see septel) have focused on the issue of independence and the "coincidence" of the U.S. Ambassador's first official trip to the RAAN occurring immediately following the declaration of independence by the Wihta Tara and the Miskito Council of Elders (reftel A). During the two-day trip we were contacted several times by Oscar Hodgson, the legal advisor to the Miskito Council of Elders, to schedule an "emergency meeting" between the Ambassador and the new Wihta Tara; however, we refused to meet.  
CALLAHAN